

10 Things To Do About Resistance

Everybody is at least a little resistant to change. They wonder how it will affect them daily and in the long-term. There are ways to overcome resistance, though.

1. Acknowledge change as a process.

Change is not an event but an ongoing process. Remember that it may take years from goal-setting to stable results. Conflict and resistance are natural processes and not signs of failure.

2. Empower stakeholders.

To get the most cooperation, stakeholders must be included as decision makers. If meeting individual needs is part of the plan, resistance is less likely. Empowering people means creating mechanisms that provide them with genuine authority and responsibility. To minimize discord, the change process should be guided by negotiation, not by issuing demands.

3. Encourage all stakeholders.

Stakeholders must be active, invested participants throughout the change process. Setting up opportunities for individuals and groups to vent concerns can be effective. Being heard is fundamental in establishing understanding and consensus.

4. Set concrete goals.

Set goals by consensus, creating a broad sense of ownership. This step is critical because stakeholders will be able to return to a shared agenda when there are missteps. This makes it easier to refocus.

5. Be sensitive.

Everyone needs respect, sensitivity, and support as they work to redefine their roles and master new concepts. Managing conflict means being aware of differences among individuals. Each stakeholder must genuinely feel valued throughout the change process.

6. Model process skills.

Teach by demonstrating the appropriate skills and actions. Trainers may find that reflecting publicly and in a straightforward manner on their own doubts and resistance may help others.

7. Develop strategies for dealing with emotions.

Educators often focus on outcomes, neglecting the emotions that can go with change. Focus on such questions as: How will our lives be different? How do we feel about the changes? Is there anything that can or should be done to honor the past before we move on?

8. Manage conflict.

Ideally, change is a negotiated process. Stakeholders should be invited to negotiate issues that may cause resistance. For example, an assistant principal may need to negotiate the needs of the whole school with faculty members more concerned with departmental priorities.

9. Communicate.

Talk, write memos, e-mail. Open communication is a necessity. It can move concerns out of the shadows so they can be resolved. Try focusing on reflective questions such as: Where are we in the process? Where are we headed?

10. Monitor process dynamics.

The constant interplay between groups involved in the change must be monitored and the appropriate adjustments must be made. Begin evaluations when the change process is being developed and continue throughout. Ongoing evaluations of progress are essential.

Source: "Shhh, the Dragon Is Asleep and Its Name Is Resistance," by Monica Janas, *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 1998 (Vol. 19, No. 3). Available online at www.nsdc.org/library/jsd/janas193.html.

“The main dangers in this life are the people who want to change everything ... or nothing.”

— Lady Nancy Astor